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CONTENTS OF THIS NUMBER:

The Moral and Religious Aspects of Herbert Spencer's Philosophy.

BY

SYLVAN DREY

*The eye reads omens where it goes,
And speaks all languages the rose :
And, stirring to be man, the worm
Mounts through all the spires of form.*

—*Nature*, i., 7.

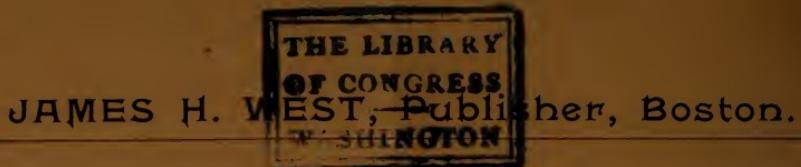
THE fossil strata show us that Nature began with rudimentary forms, and rose so to the more complex as fast as the earth was fit for their dwelling-place; and that the lower perish as the higher appear. Very few of our race can be said to be yet finished men. We still carry sticking to us some remains of the preceding inferior quadruped organization. . . . The age of the quadruped is to go out, — the age of the brain and of the heart is to come in. And if one shall read the future of the race hinted in the organic effort of Nature to mount and meliorate, and the corresponding impulse to the Better in the human being, we shall dare affirm that there is nothing he will not overcome and convert, until at last culture shall absorb the chaos and gehenna. He will convert the Furies into Muses and the hells into benefit.—*Culture*.

— RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

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THE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS
ASPECTS OF
HERBERT SPENCER'S PHILOSOPHY

BY
SYLVAN DREY

REVISED NEW EDITION

BOSTON :
JAMES H. WEST, PUBLISHER
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1889

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* * *

The London edition of this essay (1887) bore the title, "Herbert Spencer's Theory of Religion and Morality." The essay in its present form has received an addition.

* * *

The Moral and Religious Aspects of Herbert Spencer's Philosophy.

It shall be our endeavor, in the following pages, to set forth briefly Herbert Spencer's views on religion and morality. No attempt will be made to deal with any of the unfavorable criticisms of which Spencer's religious and moral theories have been made the subject. We seek not so much to defend, as to explain; and, accordingly, we shall aim at expounding: 1st. Spencer's Theory of Religion; 2nd. Spencer's Theory of Morality; 3rd. The Relation of Religion to Morality from the Spencerian point of view.

SPENCER'S THEORY OF RELIGION.

According to the Spencerian philosophy whatever acts on consciousness ranges itself either under the head of the knowable or the unknowable. This division grows out of the recognized impotence of the human mind to grasp that which "lies without the sphere of sense." The terms knowable and unknowable sufficiently explain themselves. "Phenomena and their relations" occupy the entire region of the knowable, or, to speak less abstractly, the knowable includes whatever can be brought within the range of experience. Contrariwise, under the head of the unknowable is included the "genesis and substance of things," or, to express the idea in a more comprehensive formula, the unknowable stands for the impenetrable mystery in which the origin and nature of the universe is shrouded. The most searching analysis, the most profound thought of which the human intellect is capable, cannot pierce this veil of mystery. Science deals exclusively with the knowable, while religion is concerned solely with the unknowable. Thus considered, there is and can be no conflict between religion and science; for it matters not how much our knowledge of the knowable increases, what is unknowable still remains unknowable. Indeed, every increment of knowledge

concerning phenomena renders more and more certain the unknowability of the unknowable. Not inappropriately, then, may we compare the relation which science bears to religion to the relation existing between language and music. Regarding language as the medium through which we convey to one another such of our thoughts and emotions as are susceptible of definite expression, and regarding music as the channel through which the vague and subtle feelings of the soul seek their outlet, we may say that science is the language in which our knowledge of phenomenal manifestations expresses itself, while the music of religion gives voice to those indefinable emotions which the unknowable, mysterious origin of the universe excites within us.

Having thus determined the position which religion occupies towards science, we come now to consider the nature of religion. And first, how shall we define religion from a Spencerian point of view? It may be defined as the consciousness that an inconceivable power, an inexplicable energy is everywhere revealing itself in and through the workings of the universe. The emotions of awe and reverence awakened by this consciousness deepen the conviction that the limited powers of the human mind can form no conception of the nature of such a power. Nothing, however, is more certain than its reality. This conclusion is forced on us by all that we *do* know. Beyond the assurance of its positive existence we know nothing at all about it, in any proper sense of knowing. But man is so constituted that he must conceive of it as standing in some relation of some kind to things that are known to us; we therefore feel the need of a formula to picture the relationship as it exists in our finite minds. Hence Spencer speaks of it as an "Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed." This phrase has a very theological ring, but those acquainted with Spencer's works cannot mistake its real significance. Standing alone, the meaning might be ambiguous; but, read in the light of the Spencerian philosophy, it is susceptible of only one interpretation. The appropriateness of the word "Energy," as here used, cannot be questioned. It denotes the essence of the active principle in the universe. It represents the power behind all powers, yet it is not assimilated to a blind, brute force. This Energy is characterized as "Infinite," because we can

assign to it no bounds in space; as "Eternal," because we can set no limits to it in time. The word "proceed" must be taken in its literal sense. It is by no means synonymous with "create," as that word is usually understood. It signifies precisely what it says, and nothing more; to wit, to emanate from. By the use of the term, Spencer wishes merely "to indicate the relation between knowable manifestation present to perception and the Unknown Reality which transcends perception," without pretending to explain in what way the knowable is connected with the unknowable. From this explanation the reader will readily perceive that Mr. Spencer makes no pretence to having solved the difficult problem of the origin of things. The mystery of teleology is still a teleological mystery; and the phrase referred to is but a very concise mode of expressing how great a mystery it is.*

To this "Infinite and Eternal Energy" we can ascribe no attributes. We know nothing about its form or character; "duty requires us neither to assert nor deny that it has personality, but to submit ourselves with all humility to the established limits of our intelligence in the conviction that the choice is not between personality and something lower, but personality and something higher, and that the ultimate power is no more representative in terms of human consciousness than human consciousness is representative in terms of a plant's functions."

It follows as a necessary inference from this view of a first cause that all ceremonies and forms of worship based on the current anthropomorphic conceptions of God, at variance with the Spencerian idea of a higher power, can find no corresponding place in the religion of the unknowable. Instead of these there will arise "observances tending to keep alive a consciousness of the true relation in which we stand to the unknown cause, and tending to give expression to the sentiment accompanying that consciousness." Equally inevitable is the conclusion that the functions of an agnostic minister (if I may be permitted, for the sake of convenience, to use the adjective *agnostic*

*On this point Spencer says: "Very likely there will ever remain a need to give shape to that indefinite sense of an Ultimate existence which forms the basis of our intelligence. We shall always be under the necessity of contemplating it as *some* mode of being; that is—of representing it to ourselves in *some* form of thought, however vague. And we shall not err in doing this so long as we treat every notion we thus frame as merely a symbol, utterly without resemblance to that for which it stands."—*First Principles*, p. 113.

as descriptive of Spencer's religious views) must differ materially from the duties performed by the ministry as at present constituted among Christian sects. The agnostic minister will be chiefly a moral educator; but, while discussing ethical questions, which must of themselves exert a highly elevating influence upon his hearers, he will, at the same time, have ample opportunity of ministering to their spiritual needs by appropriate references to the mysteries of cosmology, either for the purpose of quickening the religious emotions and reinforcing the religious consciousness, or with a view to emphasizing some moral lesson which he may wish to bring home to the hearts of his hearers. Thus will man's conduct be influenced in the right direction. On the one hand, the necessity of leading a moral life will be impressed upon him; on the other hand, he will be led to reflect upon that inscrutable power whose marvelous energy reveals itself in a universe of wonders—a power which, though indefinable, nay, inconceivable, is yet as real in its existence as it is unknowable in its attributes.*

*Against Spencer's view of religion, it has been urged that "the unknowable" is practically non-existent, that it is an "all-nothingness" and cannot be made the basis of a religion. It has been further contended that to speak of "the Unknowable" as a reality, is a logical absurdity. Perhaps the word "unknowable" does not adequately express the idea of a *real something whose nature cannot be comprehended by the finite mind*. For undoubtedly, if the laws of thought force us to conclude that this *something* is real, then it is certainly *pro tanto* knowable; only that is strictly unknowable about which we can predicate nothing. But let the reader carefully note that whatever valid objection there may be to the use of the word "unknowable" to express the idea above indicated, Spencer has always been cautious to emphasize the fact that he employs the term in this sense. To borrow his own words, "he everywhere speaks of the unknowable as the Ultimate Reality—the sole existence; all things present to consciousness being but shows of it."

We have already seen that, so long as the human intellect continues to be the human intellect, only the phenomenal manifestations of the universe can be brought within the region of positive knowledge; yet, in spite of our ignorance of the origin and *substratum* of things, try as we will we cannot get rid of the notion that there must be an actuality underlying all phenomena; or, as Spencer has it, "it is impossible to conceive that our knowledge is a knowledge of appearances only, without at the same time conceiving a Reality of which they are appearances; for appearances without reality are unthinkable." This conclusion, be it observed, is drawn not from any assumption of knowledge concerning that which is unknowable, but it is a necessary, *a posteriori* inference from all that we *do* know. Here we must close this discussion with the remark that one thing is certain beyond all doubt: assuming that the human mind can grasp things only in their phenomenal, and not in their noumenal aspect, then, either we know that there is an inconceivable reality transcending phenomena, or we know nothing at all. If, with a view to disproving the first part of this statement, the assumption of absolute and universal ignorance is sought to be defended, the argument, besides defeating the very purpose for which it is made, is suicidal. For he who is endowed with such superlative stupidity is, on the one hand, estopped from denying that there may be an inconceivable reality transcending phenomena; and on the other hand, he cannot prove his own supreme ignorance so long as he is too ignorant to know even what ignorance means. Moreover, even if the doctrine of universal and absolute ignorance could be proved, its strongest proof would also be its strongest refutation.

SPENCER'S THEORY OF MORALITY.

It is obviously impossible to do full justice to *The Data of Ethics* in the short space which we have allotted to its consideration. We make no pretensions even at summarizing the work; we wish merely to present a rough outline of Spencer's system of ethics to the extent that it has been developed in the book referred to.*

At the very outset attention ought to be called to the peculiar state of mind with which *The Data of Ethics* has been approached. Some critics seem to be laboring under the hallucination that Spencer claims to be a sort of magic moralist—that he has come forward with the avowed purpose of chasing the evils of this world back again into Pandora's box. Unfortunately, however, he has not been able to coerce himself into believing that immortality can be dispelled by feats of legerdemain. He regards himself as a philosophical moralist, and as such he must be judged.

The conduct of which ethics treats, according to Spencer, is but a part of human conduct in general, and general human conduct is itself a part of universal conduct; hence a clear understanding of ethical conduct can be gained only by first studying the evolution of conduct as a whole. Thus considered, conduct may be defined to be either "acts adjusted to ends, or else the adjustment of acts to ends according as we contemplate the formed body of acts or think of form alone." It is co-extensive with purposive as contradistinguished from purposeless actions. On surveying the vast extent of animal activity, we perceive that the attempted adjustment of means to ends, as the same is exhibited in the movements of living creatures, result in prolonging and intensifying life, to a greater or less extent, according as these adjustments approach perfection. The adjustments vary from very simple, very imperfect adaptations of inferior animals to complex, relatively complete adaptations of superior animals; the movements of each animal species higher up in the scale of evolution, as we ascend in the order of progression, being more and more clearly differentiated from the aimless doings of the most inferior animals whose purposeless ramblings form the germ from which the activities of the higher animals have been evolved. Hence we may legitimately conclude

*Spencer has completed only one of his projected works on ethics, viz., *The Data of Ethics*.

that advance in the evolution of conduct consists in a more perfect adjustment of means to life-furthering ends. Furthermore, by implication from the conclusion just reached, conduct cannot attain its final evolutionary stage until the adjustment of acts to life-subserving needs is absolutely complete, whether the conformity to the requirements of life be regarded solely from the standpoint of the individual, or solely from the standpoint of his offspring, or solely from the standpoint of society, or from that of all combined. So much for conduct in general. Ethics "has for its subject-matter that form which universal conduct assumes during the last stages of its evolution; these last stages in the evolution of conduct being those displayed by the highest type of being when he is forced, by increase of numbers, to live more and more in the presence of his fellows." Such, of course, are the conditions under which civilized men live, and investigation discloses the fact that, under these circumstances, conduct is regarded as good or bad according as it satisfies or fails to satisfy the demands of individual or social life. Now observe the necessary conclusions which result from a comparison of our analyses. When speaking of conduct at large we saw that the more highly evolved conduct differs from conduct less highly evolved in respect of the superior character and more complex nature of its adjustment of means to life-furthering ends, and now we see that conduct which approaches moral perfection differs from bad conduct in precisely the same way; whence we must infer that acts relatively moral always represent a more advanced stage in the evolution of conduct than immoral acts. Furthermore, just as was before concluded that conduct, regarded as a whole, cannot reach its evolutionary limit until the adjustment of acts to life-furthering ends is perfect, whether such adjustment be considered from the standpoint of each individual alone, of his offspring alone, of society alone, or of all combined, so now we must conclude (since morality is but a highly evolved part of conduct in general) that the evolution of ethical conduct is moving towards the same goal, and what was before recognized as perfectly evolved conduct, now turns out to be synonymous with perfect goodness.

This bird's-eye view of Spencer's remarkable analyses of moral conceptions introduces us at once to the true distinction between good and bad conduct. Conduct is good when

it conforms to the requirements of life; to the extent that it fails of accomplishing this end it is bad. But here it must be carefully borne in mind that, by reason of the entanglement of human actions, every act must be considered with reference to its effect upon the actor himself, upon his offspring, and upon society at large. Acts which are good so far as the individual is concerned, may be bad when regarded from the standpoint of his offspring, or of society at large. Hence, in a social state, an act is moral only when it tends simultaneously to satisfy the needs of the actor himself, of his offspring, and of society at large. In their summed-up effects, good acts are productive of more pleasure than pain; and *e converso*, bad acts produce more pain than pleasure. Perfect goodness cannot give rise to any pain at all; where pain figures as a direct result of an act, that act is *pro tanto* wrong. No course of action is absolutely right which causes even a modicum of pain. *Perfect goodness* (that is, conduct which is absolutely right), and *the greatest happiness* are terms expressive of the same idea from different points of view. *Perfect goodness* means conduct that completely satisfies the separate and combined requirements of individual and social well-being: *the greatest happiness* describes the effect produced by this ideal fitness of things. To secure the greatest possible quantum of happiness is the great desideratum of life; but, since perfect goodness is the *sine qua non* of the greatest happiness, a perfectly moral life is the only means by which this desirable end can be attained. And this is true, despite the variable character of different standards of happiness, because the general conditions to the achievement of happiness are always the same, no matter how much the special conditions may vary. Hence, while the greatest happiness is the ultimate end of life, it must not be made the direct object of pursuit. Our immediate aim must be to live at peace with our fellow-beings; to deal justly with them all in our transactions; and finally to render them active assistance in their efforts to gratify the lawful desires of life.

The conclusion that happiness must not be made the direct aim of life, thus scientifically reached, is unequivocally confirmed by our moral sense. Instinctively we are urged to obey those very rules of conduct which science demonstrates to be the translated conditions to the achiev-

ment of the greatest happiness. That civilized men are endowed with moral intuitions cannot be doubted, but nevertheless our moral intuitions are purely of human origin. They represent the cumulative experience of mankind concerning the line of conduct which must be followed in order to compass the greatest happiness of man. Being born of parents who are themselves the product of an advanced social life, there is bequeathed to civilized men, in the shape of a moral sense, the convictions of the human race that to insure happiness some courses of actions must be pursued, and others must be avoided. A practical illustration will tend to make my exposition of this important truth somewhat clearer. Referring to immoral acts, we frequently hear it said: "I could not do such a deed; I feel it would be wrong, though I do not know why." In this moral emotion is reflected a faithful statement of facts as they actually exist; for men may fall heir to the ethical conclusion of the human race without having necessarily lived through its experience.

The power of moral control which postpones immediate gratifications to more remote pleasures has been evolved from "political, religious, and social restraints." The moral deterrent from wrong-doing differs, however, from the restraints which gave it birth in this respect, that "it refers not to extrinsic, but to intrinsic effects." The real moral dread of doing wrong springs not from a fear of artificial punishment. It grows out of a desire to avoid the injurious results inevitably consequent upon immoral acts, and as the evolution of ethical conduct advances, these evil consequences will assert an ever-increasing authority over us as deterrent from wrong-doing.

We have now set forth some of the leading ideas of Spencer's ethical system, but the most defective outline of *The Data of Ethics* ought not to omit all reference to their practical importance. By implication, the imperfect condition of the social state, as at present constituted, has already been pointed out. As long as this continues, the existence of a morally perfect man is impossible. Only imperfect men can exist under our present defective social conditions. Furthermore, many acts which we of to-day look upon as right, are not absolutely right, but only relatively right—that is, they are as close an approximation to moral perfection as is possible under existing circumstances. Acts that

are relatively right may, however, be accepted as moral with the understanding that as fast as the changing social conditions permit, a nearer approach to the standard of ideal goodness is ethically imperative. Moreover, it is not always possible to determine which of two courses of action is the least wrong under circumstances which preclude us from doing what is absolutely right. In such cases we can do no more than act in as strict an accordance with the absolute right as is possible. This want of congruity between human conduct and the social environment has been brought about, to a great extent, by the warlike propensities which civilization of to-day has inherited from preceding ages. In a state of society where men are constantly on the defensive, each one will instinctively guard his own interests and disregard the claims of others. Such a mode of life long persisted in has bequeathed to us a spirit of selfishness and opposition to the desires of others, which the needs of our own social state, still militant in some aspects, yet mostly industrial, require us sometimes to foster, but more often to suppress. Until all such disturbing elements are eliminated from our present civilization, nothing like a close approximation to an ideal society is possible. But, unless the whole evolutionary theory is a farce, antagonism among men must eventually disappear, and, in obedience to the law of increasing adaptability of means to ends, social harmony, to a very high degree, must reign in its place. And if this be so, an ideal society is possible of attainment, although it cannot be regarded as a *fait accompli* until ethical conduct simultaneously reaches its physical, biological, psychological and sociological evolutionary limits, which is tantamount to saying, not only that the ideal man will conform to all the requirements of his surroundings, but likewise, that he will derive the greatest possible happiness from so doing.

And now we are in a position to appreciate an important division in ethics, an explanation of which must close this branch of our subject. We have reference to Absolute and Relative Ethics. Absolute Ethics sets forth the conditions of an ideal society; Relative Ethics aims at improving the condition of an imperfect society. Absolute Ethics formulates a code of moral laws which shape the conduct of the ideal man; Relative Ethics enjoins the imperfect man to obey these laws as far as in his power lies. The standard

of morals which Absolute Ethics sets up for the guidance of conduct is invariable, and will be recognized as authoritative so long as happiness continues to be the desideratum of life; the standard of moral compromise which Relative Ethics sets up must necessarily vary with the evolution of social life; for the changing conditions of the evolving social state must enable us, more and more nearly, to live up to the precepts of Absolute Ethics.

THE RELATION OF RELIGION TO MORALITY FROM THE SPENCERIAN POINT OF VIEW.

The few observations which we shall make here are based inferentially upon the religious and moral principles already enunciated; hence Spencer is necessarily committed to our inferences only in so far as they are logically accurate. We claim a clear title to all the *non sequiturs* which the critical reader may discover.

From Spencer's point of view it is obvious that religion and morality are quite distinct in their nature and purpose. Religion aims at keeping alive sentiments of awe and reverence for that incomprehensible power which everywhere manifests itself through the working of the universe. It seeks to define man's relation to this power and serves to remind him that in spite of its reality, its nature and attributes are and must ever be beyond human comprehension. Morality, on the other hand, has solely to do with the conduct of men. It has for its object to determine what courses of action are most conducive to personal and social well-being. From the nature of things, some modes of conduct must be best adapted to promote individual and collective happiness; and, since the maxims of absolute ethics meet this need, we value them accordingly. Hence goodness derives its inestimable value from its intrinsic worth. Not for the purpose of gaining the good-will of the unknown cause of things, not for the purpose of being rewarded in a possible life to come, in obedience to the dictates of our better self enjoined on us, but because the welfare of all is dependent upon the moral behavior of each. Beyond the knowledge that the order of things has made universal happiness contingent upon universal allegiance to the law which we call moral, we know nothing indicative of any relation between morality and the inscrutable source of things. Whether wickedness can in any

way affect the higher power, or whether we are to be punished after death for sins committed in life, are questions about which we are superlatively ignorant, but we are absolutely sure that wrong-doing causes sorrow and pain in this world, and that the wrong-doer himself often suffers untold pangs on account of his transgressions. If, however, we cannot count upon being rewarded after death for having led a virtuous life on earth, why strive to live up to the standard of absolute ethics? Three reasons present themselves: 1st. Because moral perfection is the only road that leads to the highest state of individual and social happiness; 2nd. Because wrong-doers live under the constant fear of having to pay such penalties as society imposes upon them for its own protection; 3rd. Because those who disregard the dictates of conscience are made to suffer the pangs of remorse.

It is commonly supposed that this view of religion and morality shuts out all hopes of posthumous possibilities, and makes goodness a matter solely of the intellect. Both of these suppositions are erroneous. Because we confess ourselves totally ignorant of that which lies without the region of the knowable, must we therefore deny the possibility of a life beyond the grave? Not at all. The same considerations which make it impossible to prove the immortality of the soul, render futile all attempts to disprove it. Reason cannot fathom that which lies beyond "the sphere of sense"; it cannot soar beyond the limitation of its own powers. If any one longs ardently for immortality, there can be no objection to his cherishing the hope of a life beyond the grave *provided always that the true emotional nature of such a hope be kept constantly in mind.* The Spencerian philosophy merely prohibits us from asserting or denying that which can neither be proved nor disproved; but it gives the emotions free play so long as they do not trespass upon the domains of the intellect. Since the doctrine of immortality can neither be satisfactorily refuted nor successfully demonstrated, whether men will hope for a future life beyond the grave must depend greatly upon their emotional temperaments. Those who entertain such hopes, and those who reject them, are alike logical, so long as they do not allow their feelings on the subject in any way to becloud their intellect.

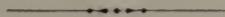
Equally unfounded is the assumption that the scientific

moralist makes the intellect the sole sanction for obeying ethical injunctions. Because science teaches us the real significance of goodness, because it points out why virtue is preferable to vice, because it confirms the dictates of a clear conscience from another point of view, is the authority of our moral sense thereby weakened? Assuredly not. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the spontaneous activity of our ethical impulses reveals its true moral grandeur only to those who can perceive how completely the principles of scientific morality harmonize with the instincts of our moral sense.

And now, in conclusion, let me ask, Why will men persist in calling this system of philosophy irreligious? Why do they persist in saying that it robs life of all beauty—of all sanctity? Does it not point, in wonder and admiration, to the mysteriously wrought grandeur of creation? Does it not proclaim, in terms most emphatic, that all Nature's forces do but shadow forth some divine reality that pervades and penetrates this universal grandeur? Does it not, in a deep sense, leave intact the hopes and fears of posthumous possibilities, and hold sacred, too, the voice of conscience? Undoubtedly. Why, then, these persistent utterances to the contrary? There can be but one explanation. Those who make them have not yet attained to that higher light which, in its glorious splendor, shall one day illumine the whole world. But pray let us not censure them. Let us treat them with becoming charity. Let us have patience; for, as surely as the sun rises and sets, the great reformation will come. The days that shall be are not as yet.

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1889

away, but "worked over" the old fabric, just as thrifty housewives do, and do so wondrously well. Therefore, if wings are needed, the fore-limbs must go—they must be transformed into wings. Ages pass on; the earth is filled with birds, beasts, and creeping things, but the quadruped is king. He has grown to enormous size and strength, and appears in almost endless varieties. The struggle for existence has preserved the strongest, the most cunning, and those most highly skilled in the art of food-getting. The fierce warfare through which all living creatures have passed, would naturally sharpen all the senses, and stimulate, little by little, the power to observe and discriminate as to friend and foe, and as to foods, and favoring localities. This would induce some sort of reflection, and implant in the mind at least a nebulous train of reason and ordered thought. This would give the brain more and better work to do, and the doing would increase its size, quality, and convolutions.

Why should advance stop at this point? Why should not the same progressive change and upward tendency still go on? Is the change from the mute little fish to a roaring Saurian less marvelous than the advance from highest mammal then existing to the earliest savage man, without speech, or language, and feeding on whatever prey the forest offered, including his own kind? Doubtless man lived thousands of years before he acquired what we would now call language. Nevertheless, his earliest cries and noises were the beginnings of connected speech; though no more intelligible than the chattering of apes.

If we could go back to this lowest conceivable savage, what should we find? Probably this: The anthropoid ape and the man-animal not quite out of sight of each other, but evolving on divergent roads from a common ancestor. If we could have stood near the diverging point, it would have been difficult to tell which had the potency of the dominant animal who rules the world to-day.

Most people who try to reason about the matter, make the mistake of attempting to bridge the chasm at once from Shakespeare to a shrimp; and they say the difference is so enormous that Evolution cannot be true. But the thoughtful student goes back step by step, age by age, until he stands side by side with a creature half upright and howling, with all the ferocious instincts of a brute, but yet

PREFACE.

EVOLUTION : The word is in every mouth. A vague, often an incorrect conception of its meaning in the field of biology and with reference to the origin of Man, has reached the popular mind, and stirred it to further investigation and inquiry. Even in its biological aspects, the doctrine of Evolution is seen to touch the great problems of religion and philosophy—of origin and destiny. But it is beginning to be understood that not alone as an explanation of the method whereby living forms have been produced and developed is this doctrine alive with human interest and pregnant with important influences upon human thought and human welfare. Evolution, reaching backward, takes hold upon the great cosmic problems of the birth and growth of worlds, the nature of Matter and Spirit, the relation of the phenomenal Universe to its efficient Cause. Reaching forward, it touches and illuminates the pressing problems of ethics and sociology, offering to the careful student wise instruction for his guidance in all the practical affairs of life.

Evolution, it is said, is not a philosophy, it is not a religion—"it is only a method." But it is a *universal* method ; the discovery and formulation of its law as applied to all the processes of inorganic, organic, social and intellectual development, constitutes the widest generalization of science. It cannot be otherwise, therefore, than that its acceptance should necessitate a reconsideration of the fundamental problems of philosophy and religion, as well as a reconstruction of our notions in regard to the permanence of species and the origin of human life. As tersely defined by Professor Le Conte, "Evolution is continuous, progressive change, according to certain laws, and by means of resident forces." In the place of miracle it posits law ; instead of creation *ex nihilo*, it affirms an orderly development resulting from the action of eternally-existent forces ; for the old conception of a mechanical universe set in motion by a non-resident Creator, it substitutes that of a vital universe, the "resident forces" of which are symbols of a Power that is at once immanent and transcendent,—revealed in all its relations to our human consciousness, but by the very

nature of that consciousness forever unknown in its ultimate essence.

Universal in its scope, penetrating every region of thought and life, it appeared to the managers of the Brooklyn Ethical Association Lectures that no work could be of more general and vital interest than that of popularizing correct views of the Evolution philosophy. An advance copy of our programme sent to Mr. Herbert Spencer, elicited from him a letter of cordial commendation,* in which he affirmed that "The mode of presentation described seems to me admirably adapted for popularizing evolution views," and expressed a hope that the lectures might be widely circulated in printed form. Efforts in this direction were subsequently undertaken. The preparation of these lectures has been a labor of love, and for the most part gratuitous on the part of their authors. As separately published, they have already been profitably used by numerous societies and individuals engaged in this study, and it is hoped that they may have a yet wider circulation in the form in which they are now offered to the public. The chief hope and desire of the Ethical Association, and of the authors of these lectures, will not be met, however, unless they stimulate thought beyond their mere perusal, and prepare many minds for the systematic reading of the more complete expositions of the Evolution philosophy in the works of Spencer, Fiske, Darwin, Haeckel, Wallace, Huxley, Tyndall, Cope, and other recognized authorities. Not merely to satisfy, but to create hunger for truth is the object of these lectures. The subject is too vast to be treated completely in a single volume. We are aware of imperfections—yet we trust that the lectures will serve the purpose for which they are intended, and thus justify the labor and devotion of those who have participated in their production and publication.

* Printed in full on page 19.

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tent of the universe. Are there an infinite number of worlds, extending beyond our utmost vision? We cannot know. All the objects within the reach of the most powerful telescopes belong to our universe. It is possible that other universes exist beyond, which we are unable to perceive because of the absence of a luminiferous ether, connecting them with our range of vision. It is an interesting question whether our universe is still young and growing, or whether it is now on its downward course, tending to decay and death. Respecting this question it may be said that we find within the range of vision very few dead



Fig. 13. Spiral nebula in Canes Venatici.

stars, while the number of nebulæ in process of forming into stars is very great. We may therefore assume that the universe is still in a youthful condition and has not passed the noon of its existence. The spectroscope assures us that those stars which shine with a red light are the oldest, and the nearest extinction. Of these there are comparatively few.

We have brought the history of a planet from the period of its primal evolution out of the fiery mist, to its extinction. Is this all? Will there be no resurrection of dead worlds? When a planet like the moon has parted with its heat it will still continue to rotate on its axis and to re-

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